

Queensland **Ballet**

# Evaluation of Queensland Ballet's Kindy Moves Project

Developed by  
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**QUT** creative  
industries

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QUT acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands where QUT now stands, and pays respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to play within the QUT community.

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# About Kindy Moves

Lady Gowrie Caboolture East Community Kindergarten (LGCECK), part of The Gowrie (Qld) Inc. education network, provides a play-based kindergarten program for fifty children run by a qualified early childhood teacher, educators and support staff. The service is an Approved Kindergarten Program Provider that commenced operation in 2010 and is co-located with the Early Years' Service which commenced in 2007 and provides the opportunity for children and families to access further community programs and support from specialist services.

With funding from an Arts Queensland Artist in Residence Grant, The Gowrie (Qld) Inc. engaged Queensland Ballet (QB) to present the Kindy Moves program, a ten-week creative movement syllabus specifically designed for early years learning. The program was delivered in term 3 of the school year (2018) through two 45 minute lessons (one lesson per group each week)<sup>1</sup>. The children who participated in Kindy Moves were four and five years of age.

The program intersects with the Early Years Learning Framework and Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines by supporting opportunities for children to engage with and develop further confidence in relation to the learning and development areas of identity, wellbeing, active learning and communicating. The program also supports the service team in relation to their ongoing reflective practice, professional development and demonstrating the Professional Engagement domains of teaching of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The teaching team at LGCECK are committed to ongoing professional development and have experience in participating in projects, reporting on outcomes from the projects, implementing learning and strategies from projects with further groups and sharing this learning with families, colleagues from within the organisation and early childhood services in the broader community.

QB's teaching artists worked in a pair (one male and one female) to deliver the same content to each group of students (group A and group B as dictated by the kindergarten schedule) thereby providing a consistency and familiarity for all. For children at LGCECK this is a central consideration for their ongoing wellbeing, as most continue to experience difficult personal situations, where kindergarten is often the only safe and secure environment they know. Students will feel safe to learn and explore through dance while also seeing positive, committed and consistent role models.

Each week, students were guided through a variety of group and small group movement-based activities to promote collaboration and self-management. Over the course of the ten-week program the content progressed in difficulty, providing a space for students to find their own sense of agency and pride. While the children explore their imagination and natural movement they honed their coordination, strength, listening, language and vocabulary development. At the conclusion of the ten-week program, all students were presented with a QB Junior Friends membership that will assist to maintain lasting connection to QB, thus extending the life of the project's impact.

Parents/Carers were invited to participate in the last session with their child. This sharing will support the children's families to develop the whole child and will demonstrate the importance of physical activity in children's lives, particularly as studies show that there has been a reduction in play and activity in children in the past 10-15 years which may lead to health issues such as obesity, poor sleep patterns, lethargy and disengagement from learning. As most of the students at LGCECK come from low socio-economic backgrounds, providing a free, in-school arts experience creates an opportunity to interact with the Arts that may not otherwise exist.

**The program has six key goals. At the completion of the program it was anticipated that the students should:**

1. develop a new, kinaesthetic approach to learning core skills.
2. be able to express themselves creatively.
3. be able to use movement to aid in understanding literacy and numeracy.
4. develop a disposition for understanding the world through dance.
5. feel an enhanced sense of belonging and enjoyment in going to kindergarten.
6. become connected to and feel valued by QB through ongoing membership of QB Junior Friends.

Note: Descriptive text about Kindy Moves has been drawn from Arts Queensland Artist in Residence application jointly written by The Gowrie (Qld) Inc. and QB and Letter to Families written by QB.

<sup>1</sup> LGCECK runs a split week program for two groups of 25 children in each group.

# Research Framework



QB commissioned Queensland University of Technology, Creative Industries Faculty, under the leadership of Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof to undertake an evaluation of the first delivery of the Kindy Moves program. The research timeframe was thirteen weeks that included the ten weeks for the delivery of Kindy Moves as well as further three weeks post-delivery for data collection. The aims of the evaluation were:

1. To understand how QB teaching approaches and content used in their informal learning engagement for young children called Tiny Dancers could be redeveloped for delivery in a formal early years learning context such as a kindergarten.
2. To enhance the learning community at QB and to overtly develop links between early years learning programs.
3. To apprehend the impact of teaching artists working alongside kindergarten educators to deliver movement programs in early years learning contexts.

The research has ethical approval from the QUT Research Ethics Unit:

Ethics Category: Human - Negligible-Low Risk  
UHREC Reference number: 180000623  
Dates of approval: 13/07/2018 to 13/07/2019  
Project title: Evaluation of Queensland Ballet's Kindy Moves Project

**Data for this report has been drawn from the following five key sources:**

1. Observation of learning experiences delivered by QB Teaching Artists.
2. Interviews with the two teaching artists delivering the Kindy Moves program.
3. Interview with lead teacher from LGCECK.
4. Focus group with teaching staff from LGCECK.
5. Written and visual work samples from LGCECK children who engaged in the program.



## Data Management

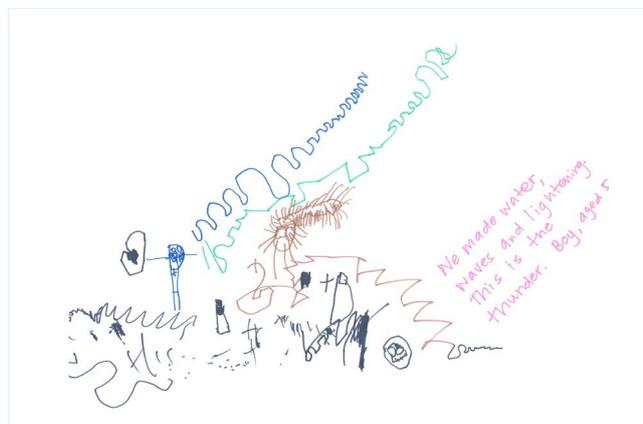
To maintain the confidentiality of the research participants (in accordance with research ethics) names have been replaced with title (Teaching Artist and Kindergarten Teacher) and an alphabetical letter. Not all parent/carers of the kindergarten children who participated in the Kindy Moves program agreed to have their children involved in the research. Some parent/carers agreed for their child to participate in the research but asked for the child's identity to be withheld. To maintain consistency all data has been de-identified.

## Limitations of the Data

The findings from this research must be read as indicative rather than encompassing or definitive in relation to the outcomes for the children, kindergarten teachers and teaching artists. This is due to the small data sample and the brevity of the Kindy Moves program as well as the research timeframe. No pre-testing of the children was undertaken due to time limitations therefore this is not a comparative study. To be able to correlate direct causality of the research outcomes the data sample would need to be larger and be longitudinal in nature as to capture evidence of outcomes over time.

Below: Child response to question — What do you remember about dancing with (Teaching Artist A and Teaching Artist B)?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The words in brackets were replaced with the names of the teaching artists.





## Program Commendations

- Ensuring teaching artists who delivered Kindy Moves had a strong connection to working in learning environments for young children allowed for quality and caring engagement for all children and their teachers.
- Engaging two teaching artists to deliver the program in each session allowed for co-planning, co-teaching and division of tasks to help the sessions run effectively.
- Employment of one female and one male teaching artist effectively modelled inclusivity and diversity for all students.
- The playful and child-centred delivery of movement experiences for the children demonstrates a clear anchoring in the play-based learning approach of The Gowrie (Qld) Inc. education network and the learning principles of the Early Years Learning Framework.
- The use of metaphor provided clear explanations through imagery and imagination related to ballet positions for the children who retained this knowledge and applied it in other dance contexts.
- Employment of teaching artists who had a long history of engagement with multiple projects and the life of the company ensured that the personnel had a commitment to the QB ethos as well as an understanding of the commitment to quality. This approach supports dancers in their career transitions and allows them continued engagement through their substantial knowledge of the dance art form.

## Program Recommendations

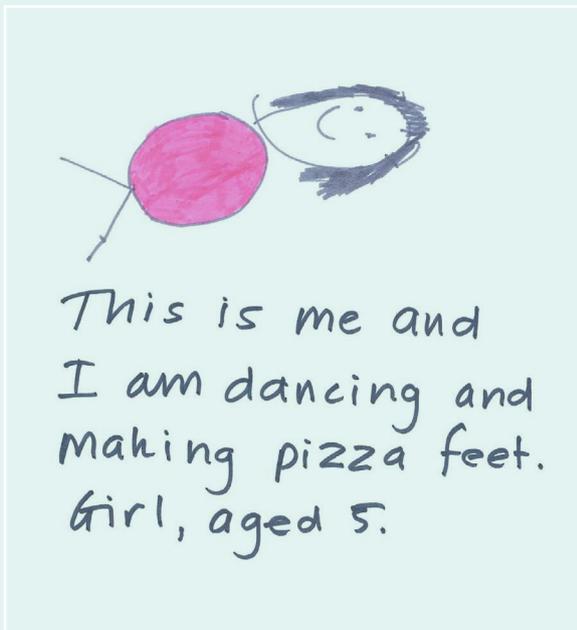
- Select only quality children's picture books to enhance the literacy component of the program. Perhaps look to recommendations from the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) This would enhance QB's goal for the literacy goal for the program.
- Inclusion of ballet terminology at the commencement of the program to stretch the vocabulary development of the children as well as providing clear links into the ballet form.
- Increased attention to numeracy component with emphasis on patterning — making patterns and recognising patterns, repeating patterns including working in different group sizes. Patterning is a key activity in dance and can therefore support numeracy learning for the children.
- Where possible consult with kindergarten teachers to link books and movement experiences with teaching thematics and or learning focus for the time in which the program is in the kindergarten. This will deepen and extend the program for children.
- Learning experiences (lesson plans) should be provided to kindergarten teachers prior to the commencement of the program so that teachers can support and extend the movement experiences beyond the engagement by the QB teaching artists and can provide advice to teaching artists if modifications are required to enable engagement by children with differentiated learning needs.
- Where possible embed a greater art form focus by exposing children to the tropes of ballet through ballet language, access to costumes and ballet shoes (both male and female) and performance so that children and teaching staff gain a greater understanding of how the movement experiences they have in Kindy Moves translate into the art form of ballet and classical dance.

# Impact Narratives

## Views from The Participants

### (Kindergarten Children)

The children who participated in Kindy Moves are predominantly pre-literate, meaning that they are not yet fluent readers and writers. For this reason the children's responses to the program were gathered through stories represented visually (through drawing) and orally (in stories told to the kindergarten teacher and the researcher who then recorded the children's stories in written words). It should be noted that not all parents/carers provided permission for their child to participate in this research.



The most striking evidence to emerge from the drawings and stories is the impact that the use of ballet specific words and actions (plié, sauté, port de bras, révérence, first position, second position, pizza feet — a metaphor for first position by the teaching artists) used in the dance learning experiences had on the children. The majority of children could recall the words and use them in context with a clear understanding of what movement the words represented. The image above demonstrates the recall of a ballet position by engaging with the metaphor used by the teaching artists.



From the 32 responses gathered from the children, 27 responses (84%) showed recall of ballet terminology through both image and oral language three weeks after the conclusion of the program. The images (above and below) and stories following demonstrate this evidence.

Without prompting or overt demonstration some children saw correlations between what they had learned in Kindy Moves and their engagement with dance in contexts outside of the program. One example of this transference came through in anecdotal evidence from the kindergarten teachers via discussions with parents/carers. Two female participants in the program shared what they had learned about first and second position with the imagery of 'pizza feet' with their dance teacher in their weekly tap dancing class. Through observation of the weekly sessions with the children and the teaching artists it was clear that the children responded well to the use of metaphor to explain movements in warm up and warm down — happy back (posture), magic glue (controlling leg movement), butterfly legs (stretching for flexibility). Observational notes show that by week seven of the program the children recognised ballet words and metaphors without further explanation from the teaching artists and were able to initiate the movement. These child responses demonstrate the efficacy of "embodied learning" (Stolz, 2015) to support different learning styles of children and to aid engagement, memory and recall.

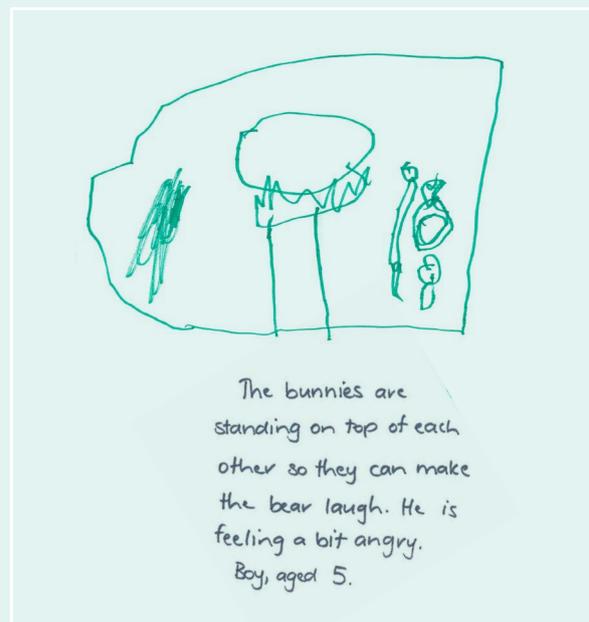


## Kindy Moves



Using an embodied learning approach supports a child-centred approach to movement experiences and demonstrates a clear anchoring in the play-based learning approach of The Gowrie (Qld) Inc. education network and the learning principles of the Early Years Learning Framework. Taking this approach is an overt engagement of learner agency and possibility thinking. Creativity theorist Anna Craft developed possibility thinking, a way of approaching everyday challenges in life with a “what if” mindset, transforming “what is” to “what might be” (Craft, 2000). Craft identifies in possibility thinking, a set of capabilities that are the driving force behind building personal agency that include attributes such as imagination, posing questions, play and engaging in risk taking. Craft (2000; Craft, et al., 2008; Craft, et al., 2001) views play as an essential element of both problem-solving and developing social interaction skills, such as empathy. There is a sense of ‘being in the moment’ (Craft, 2000), engaging the individual’s body, imagination and sensory faculties.

In the delivery of the Kindy Moves program the teaching artists used children’s picture books to anchor the movement activities. This allowed the children to generate movement responses with the teaching artists through identification of characters from the book. Using this supported engagement, rather than what Teaching Artist A named as “a call and response or mirroring movement” approach used in most formal dance education environments, marks Kindy Moves out as being different from traditional approaches to learning in ballet. Teaching Artist A noted that, “sometimes it is a little bit scary to create movement from nothing. The book characters give the children something to base their movement on”. Coupled with the children’s recall of ballet specific language and associated movements, the data from the children also shows that the recall of the characters and the sequence of events in the picture books was strong. Teaching Artist B stated that, in the kindergarten context, “storytelling is more important than the steps and techniques”. The images (above and right) demonstrate this recall as well as how the children are innovating on the text by adding their own possible events that were not seen in the picture book.



# Impact Narratives

## Views from Kindergarten Educators

### (Teaching Staff From Lady Gowrie Caboolture East Community Kindergarten)

The kindergarten teachers<sup>3</sup> at LGCECK reported that the program provides a strong exemplar of a developmental movement program that demonstrates how early years educators could include dance and movement in their learning program. Kindergarten Teacher A noted that, “the program allows for individual engagement from the children rather than regimentation”. The teacher went on to say that, “teaching steps and choreography for this age group would not be appropriate or in keeping with the play-based learning approach used in early learning settings” (Kindergarten Teacher A).

Kindergarten Teacher A saw clear connections with three of the five learning objectives in Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education and Training (n.d., p. 22) that are articulated as: Children are connected with and contribute to their world; Children have a strong sense of wellbeing; and Children are confident and involved learners. The teacher extrapolated on how these connections were observed in the program by saying, “Kindy Moves worked with physical well-being particularly around gross motor skills, active learning and creative learning as well as connectedness by building relationships with peers, working with a partner and taking turns” (Kindergarten Teacher A).

One of the stated goals for the Kindy Moves program was to enable children to feel an enhanced sense of belonging and enjoyment in going to kindergarten. When asked the question — Has the program enabled learners to develop greater confidence and sense of well-being? If so, can you provide an example from your observation of the children’s engagement? — the kindergarten teachers reported seeing changes in children’s physical engagement and social engagement with the world as a result of the program. The following three short vignettes developed from the discussion in response to the question above provide an insight.

### Child One

Kindergarten Teacher A described this child as being reticent to initiate movement or participate in movement based activities. The child has cerebral palsy but has the capacity to move independently. When the kindergarten teacher reminded the children that the teaching artists (teacher used names but for this research names are anonymised) would be coming to dance the following day the child said that he would watch as he did not know how to dance. With one-on-one support from the kindergarten teacher to stand up and move his body in sessions one and two, and by using imagery that he was familiar with to encourage movement the teacher encouraged the child to engage. The child readily identifies with the action characters ‘Transformers’. The teacher used this as a base to translate the movement from the teaching artists such as proud back and sad back (used to denote dance posture) into power up and power down (language used by the Transformers). Translating the movement into language and imagery familiar to the child helped with both engagement and initiation of movement. The kindergarten teacher witnessed a slow change in attitude to movement during the Kindy Moves sessions and also saw this new found confidence with movement translate into everyday kindergarten activities. For example, typically during group time (where children have a choice of a variety of activities including outdoor play) the child would sit to the side and play alone. Over the ten weeks of the program the kindergarten teacher watched the child’s confidence with his body grow resulting in an increase in physical engagement with his environment and peers.

### Child Two

Kindergarten Teacher C described the child as having social-emotional difficulties related to working with peers, emotional attachment and self-isolation. Like child one described above, child two struggled in the early part of the Kindy Moves program to engage in the activities or initiate movement. Kindergarten Teacher C noted that child’s visible lack of confidence prevented the child from participating in most kindergarten activities and as such this disengagement was not particular to Kindy Moves. Again, with the support and modeling from the kindergarten teacher the child slowly moved from complete non-engagement to intermittent engagement. Over the ten weeks of the program the kindergarten teacher observed in week seven that the child was gaining trust of herself and of those around her. Kindergarten Teacher C witnessed enjoyment that was seen with visible smiling from the child that according to the teacher was spontaneous and rare. While the child was not able to fully participate in all the activities for a full 45 minute session there was a small movement toward independent engagement.

### Child Three

Kindergarten Teacher C described the child as being shy and one that plays predominantly alone. During one of the morning check-ins with parents as they dropped the child at the kindergarten the parents relayed to the kindergarten teacher that the child was coming home after the day in which Kindy Moves delivered a workshop and was sharing some of the movements and talking about what was done in Kindy Moves. The parents noted to Kindergarten Teacher C that this sharing was not usually what the child chose to do.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Gowrie Caboolture East Community Kindergarten has three kindergarten teachers on staff supporting 25 children in each of its two program groups.

## Kindy Moves

Looking across the commonalities of the three vignettes the data shows that Kindy Moves was able to increase children's self-confidence and enabled greater use of social competencies. The development of social competencies is one of the stated aims of Kindy Moves that is connected to the program goal expressed as, "feel an enhanced sense of belonging and enjoyment in going to kindy". Broadly, social competency can be defined as the ability to attain personal or group success in social situations that determine a child's social effectiveness (Chen & French, 2008, p. 592). Social competency may affect behaviours, relationships and developmental patterns. These dimensions may manifest in the "exhibition, meaning, and development of specific social behaviours such as sociability, shyness-inhibition, cooperation-compliance, and aggression-defiance, as well as the quality and function of social relationships" (Chen & French, 2008, p. 591).

Coupled with the increase in self-confidence for some children Kindergarten Teacher A observed that three children described above, "have become more confident to explore space and respond physically" (Kindergarten Teacher A).

The Kindy Moves program goal to, "be able to use movement to aid in understanding literacy and numeracy" was very evident to the kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten Teacher A said that, "the program brought books to life and provides children with another way to view the story and opened possibilities for kindergarten teachers to incorporate other ways of literacy and numeracy into their program". The kindergarten teachers noted the innovation of the teaching artists to use the texts not only to stimulate movement but to also extend the text using other print and visual forms such as maps that were then translated into movement, thereby enabling an abstract idea to become concrete for the children. While the attention to numeracy in the program was not as strong as the literacy engagement through the use of picture books as a catalyst for movement activities, the kindergarten teachers were pleased with the reinforcement of counting that the program provided. Kindergarten Teacher B suggested that, "the numeracy component could be enhanced with more obvious attention to patterning including changes in group sizes and remembering sequences of activities explored through movement linked to the books".

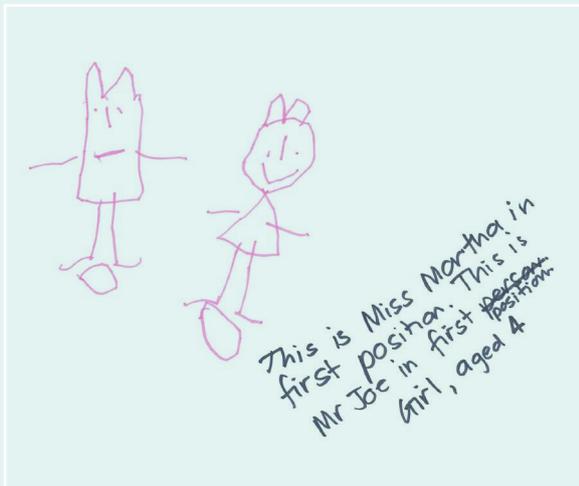
**While the kindergarten teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the delivery and benefits of the program, they indicated that there were three key elements of the program that required improvement:**

- Greater clarity about the nature of the learning and student outcomes is needed for kindergarten teachers to understand the nature of Kindy Moves. Kindergarten Teacher A commented, "coming into the program I was unsure of what to expect. They thought the program would have been more dance orientated". When asked for more detail about this the kindergarten teacher said that she anticipated, "more choreography, learning this dance and this set of steps and teaching fundamental movement skills such as skipping and hopping". However, this comment must be read in concert with the same teacher's comment about inappropriateness of choreography for this age group (see page 10).
- Access to the overview of the learning experiences (lesson plans) should be provided to kindergarten teachers prior to the commencement of the program. This would enable teachers to support and extend the movement experiences beyond the engagement by the QB teaching artists. The kindergarten teachers indicated that access to resources such as music (note: kindergartens generally does not use Spotify so another mode of delivery would need to be used), list of picture books used in the lessons, suite of movement ideas, and a charted progression of gross motor skills for learning and how to teach them would assist with the integration of Kindy Moves into the kindergarten program.
- Greater clarity at the commencement of the program as to the nature of the culminating activity that involved sharing with parents/carers is needed. Kindergarten Teacher A suggested that the provision of a short weekly summary of activities be provided by the Kindy Moves program for promotion through parent/carer newsletter and kindergarten bulletin boards so parents can follow up at home if they wish. Such actions would overtly support the Early Years Learning Framework principle of "partnership with families" (Australian Government Department of Education and Training n.d., p. 11).

# Impact Narratives

## Views from Teaching Artists

The teaching artists employed to design and deliver Kindy Moves demonstrate longevity of engagement with QB across a number of programs including junior extension program, associate program through Queensland Dance School of Excellence, company dancer, EdSquad teaching artist, teaching artist with Tiny Dancers (early years program at QB) and community engagement program co-ordinator. The employment of teaching artists who have a long history of engagement over multiple projects, as well as the life of the company, ensured that the personnel had a commitment to the QB ethos as well as an understanding of the commitment to quality. Additionally taking such an approach supports dancers in their career transitions and allows them continued engagement through their substantial knowledge of the dance art form. The need for supported transition from a professional dance career was highlighted in an industry report that recommended, “implementing minimal or cost neutral services (i.e., mentoring, job shadowing, work experience, internal workshops) in addition to providing such services during work hours, would make a significant difference to dancers (Moyle 2016, p. i) in their career transitions.



The two teaching artists who delivered Kindy Moves understood clear the role that their artistry plays in being able to work in an education context. By definition a “teaching artist can be identified as a teacher who chooses to artfully and effectively use an aesthetic dimension to their teaching practice” (Gattenhof 2013, p.85). Teaching Artist A defined the role as, “someone who has had a professional career and is someone who is able to incorporate their artistry into a learning context. It is more than taking one off classes”. Teaching Artist B concurs with Teaching Artist A by saying, “[it is about] sharing knowledge I have learnt in my professional career and extending [the work] the standard technical aspects of dance”. Both teaching artists agreed that, “your artistry leads first in a teaching context” (Teaching Artist A).

Such an approach to teaching and learning can be understood to engage both cognitive and emotive process simultaneously. In the field it is referred to as “sensuous knowing” (O’Neill, 1985). This type of teaching moves beyond the simple attainment of facts and figures or in this case steps and technique. As such it requires those engaged in teaching through their artistry to make personal meaning, that is, to have a personal encounter with the art form. At the heart of the teaching artists’ engagement with learners is the teaching approach developed by education and arts philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) known as co-artistry. This methodology does not embrace a master-apprentice model to learning. Instead it is based upon a reciprocal learning model and supports the principle of “Secure, Respectful And Reciprocal Relationships” in the Early Years Learning Framework (p. 13). This type of learning places an emphasis on an aesthetic, experiential approach to learning that has great significance in assisting children to locate themselves sensuously and consciously within the world. For the two teaching artists in Kindy Moves the engagement of co-artistry with the children was the greatest point of new learning. Teaching Artist B noted that, “Kindy Moves taught me to listen and work from the children’s level” while Teaching Artist A said that working in the program, “forced me to think about how I can use imagery in my teaching rather than merely focusing on technique and how we need to take this into all the work we do”.

## Kindy Moves

Both Teaching Artist A and Teaching Artist B believe that the success of the program was partly due to the fact that there were two QB staff delivering the program which provided balance in terms of experience and delivery. Teaching Artist A, who has more experience in working as a teaching artist in the company, noted, “LGCECK teachers were outstanding in their engagement and involvement in the program but this cannot be guaranteed in all early years learning contexts. For this reason alone it is important to have two teaching artists delivering the program”. Teaching Artist B made comment that, “having a male and female teaching artist in the program allowed for diversity in terms of identification for the children”. Teaching Artist A made note of how the commitment by QB to engage two teaching artists for Kindy Moves enabled, “the basic logistics in terms of set up both before and during the activities flow thereby increasing their ability to engage the children rather than having to stop the action” Teaching Artist A. Teaching Artist A went on to say that, “working collaboratively [with another teaching artist] provided immediate feedback on activities that could be modified instantly if needed” (ibid.).

For both teaching artists Kindy Moves was a learning experience. When asked the question — **What new skills or understandings have you gained as a teaching artist from the program that you will carry forward into other projects? — teaching artists identified four key points of learning:**

1. The importance of deliberately reflecting on my teaching practices for improvement (Teaching Artist A).
2. An increased awareness of the need for inclusivity and making all the activities accessible to all children regardless of capabilities (Teaching Artist B).
3. Importance of the use of repetition when working with children in the early years to develop confidence in undertaking tasks (Teaching Artist B).
4. Building a sense of belonging, well-being, confidence and safety (that is all ideas are accepted and valid) for children and the kindergarten teachers throughout the program allows for maximum participation (Teaching Artist A).

Additionally, Teaching Artist A noted that the skills that are an inherent part of ballet etiquette were needed for all learners regardless of age — sharing, turn-taking, listening and following instructions, working in teams — are the same skills the kindergarten teachers are working on with the children to build social competencies. As such Kindy Moves is a complementary activity to a kindergarten program.

When asked to reflect on possible amendments to the program if they had the opportunity to deliver it in the future the two teaching artists offered the following responses:

- Increase the emphasis on gross motor skill development with particular emphasis on skipping, hopping, galloping, marching.
- Provide a possible extension of Kindy Moves program with examples of ballet technique for children who want to explore what they have experienced further that could be delivered through the QB website with access for QB Junior Friends.



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## Conclusion

QB's Kindy Moves program provides access to movement and dance for children who may not otherwise have access to ballet for reasons of economic, geographic or social inequity. Through modeling and co-artistry the program also provides a source of professional development for kindergarten teachers who have an interest in including movement in their learning programs but may not have either the confidence or skills to do so. Additionally, the program provides a supported transition model for professional dancers who may wish to engage their considerable dance skills and knowledge in a formal learning context such as kindergartens and primary schools. As Teaching Artist B said, "having such a program in a state ballet company contributes to children's general awareness of culture, of ballet and the arts". Essentially Kindy Moves allows young children to understand that dance is for everyone, and to develop confidence in moving and dancing for enjoyment regardless of whatever they choose to do in life.

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# Queensland **Ballet**

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